

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by David Morton, H. Underwood Hoyt,
Abbie Huston Evans, Isidore Schneider, John
Gould Fletcher, Bernard Raymund, and others

Elinor Wylie and Jessica Nelson North Reviewed

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Contents

POEMS	Page
How One Walked in Sorrow. By David Morton.....	3
The Bird. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	4
To a Maryland Yellow-Throat. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	4
Ferns. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	4
More Lovely Than a Mountainside. By H. Underwood Hoyt	5
An Unprejudiced Mind. By H. Underwood Hoyt.....	5
The Spread Table. By Abbie Huston Evans.....	6
The Light on the Rock. By Abbie Huston Evans.....	6
Morning. By George O'Neil.....	8
O Be Not Silent. By George O'Neil.....	8
Question. By Isidore Schneider.....	9
The Autumn Horsemen. By John Gould Fletcher.....	12
Tension. By Harold Lewis Cook.....	14
After Plenty. By Bernard Raymund.....	14
IN REVIEW	
Fresh Herbs. By Louise Townsend Nicholl.....	15
A Jewel Hard Enough. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	17

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How One Walked In Sorrow

LIKE one who carries banners,
You tread the common street:
The paving stones are proud of you,
And all the air is sweet
As with triumphal flowers
That fall before your feet.

And common folk remember,
Seeing you passing by,
How tragic queens have walked the earth,
Gone proudly forth to die. . . .
A lifted, living beauty,
Above the fickle lie.

We shall be long forgetting
The regal way you went,
Crowned with some secret certainty,
Some truth magnificent,—
Till our blind hearts may learn, at last,
The splendid thing you meant.

—*David Morton*

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The Bird

THE serpent knows
The oldest trade,
Oh bird seduced,
Brightly afraid;
Watching the glints
In the snake's eyes,
Dark promises
Of paradise;
Watching and waiting and at length
Dissolved in the snake's strength.

To a Maryland Yellow-Throat

AN animated cameo.
No, that's too harsh a word
For you, made from a gold-black shadow,
Sun-sculptured bird.

Ferns

THE fronds of ferns uncurl like growing granite.
Some stones that blossomed on another planet
Scattered their seeds and the wind thrust one here
To germinate an aeon and a year.
Oh, something terribly abysmal burns
In me when I perceive uncoiling ferns.

—Kenneth Slade Alling

More Lovely Than a Mountainside

YOUR shoulders hold more beauty than a hill
Holds when the wind curls over it in summer;
You are more lovely than a mountainside
All overgrown with end-of-August flowers:
Blue gentian, and blue thistles, and blue asters;
Lean softly toward me: you are lovelier
Than a grey pine-tree standing in the sun.
Your hands are kind: touch me and make me know
You are more strong than all the winds that blow.

An Unprejudiced Mind

WHERE have you run with ankles long unwearied
And knees cooled by the wind? Where have your heels
Printed the air with dint and streak and dint?
Unstumbling you have run down stony fields
After the skyline, till your very thoughts
Learned how to run: and if your feet are strong
From leaping tip-toe among rooty clods
Your mind is strong too, running in harsh land
Where loose stones bruise and grasses catch and cut.
I think your mind can go barefoot, unhurt
Even where nettles are, can dare to step
Deep among roots and in rough-bladed grass,
And in strange ferns with thorns: oh you can go
Unstumbling and uncut where wild grapes grow!

—*H. Underwood Hoyt*

The Spread Table

(After a verse-pattern of W. H. Davies)

WHEN I see birds whose names I do not know
Light on a tree-top twenty feet below,
And, though I am so near them, never care,
But peck at cones, a thousand feet in air;

When I see spruces bitten by the wind
Scaling the cliff without a look behind,
And off at sea, across the mountain's face,
Behold far-sprinkled islands and blue space;

And when, no longer level, the blue sea
Hangs from the sky like a great tapestry,—
Hangs from the sky, but keeps its blue unblent,
Let down about like the side-wall of a tent:

When I see these things, knowing as I do
I break to-day's bread and to-morrow's too,
At the spread table of the waves and stones
I feed on beauty as the birds on cones.

The Light On the Rock

(To E. A. T.)

ALL the while, as the afternoon wore on,
If I but turned my head, there on the stone
Beside me I saw poetry like a stain.
The level sun came in through the thin leaves
And lit an angle of the lichened rock
Till it took fire with beauty; I could see
That tenderness was on it like a bloom,
But whether laid upon it from without,
Or breaking to the surface from within,
I could not tell: there anyway it was,
A kind of holiness plain to the eye.

A moose-wood spray growing there in the cleft
Spread to the air its few large perfect leaves,
And wavered now and then as if in thought.
Such rank wild things as grew upon the ledge—
The unkempt grass and clambering huckleberries
Along the top, and here and there in cracks
Burrs of green moss and tough little rock-ferns clinging
Like grim death—knew a thing or two, I felt,
That I could only guess at. — Lichens too,
Big as my palm, smoke-colored, caught in the middle,
And curling up and out like juiceless flowers
Suckled on granite, piqued me with their silence.

But most of all, that light upon the rock
That made it different somehow from the rest,
As if in some strange way addressed to me,
Made my heart beat whenever I turned and saw it.
I couldn't bring myself to speak of it
Even to you—it was too strictly mine—
Perhaps some other spot shone out for you;
And yet I think it colored all I said.
This much I knew, though it was days before
The knowledge cleared itself into a thought:
I could risk myself in the hands of any God
Who could make a light like that upon the rock!

—*Abbie Huston Evans*

Morning

O WONDER of the shining world,
Speak with less radiance to one
Who sees bright things with agony
And aches with sun.

O tenderness, O tenderness. . .
The dew has made a playing child
Of every little blade of grass
And leaf blown wild.

O dreaming loam and dreaming blood,
Stir, stir . . . there is no rest . . .
Life is a lifted yearning wing
With star for nest.

O Be Not Silent

A DAY will come when the ardent Earth shall cool
And the green sea shall wander anywhere
And the pointed moon shall stab no singing fool
And lead no weeping child along a stair . . .

After the last white sea-bird drops his wing
And towns are tumbled heaps unvisited
And nothing glitters with the spark of Spring
And the final word for beauty has been said,—

Silence shall rim the darkness that descends
To wander slowly into ruined lands
Where no word falters between thwarted friends
And no pathetic lover lifts his hands.

—George O'Neil

Question

History of a Conversation

THE melancholy of the sun
is its question,
intent eye, inflaming the sky
with its search.

Astonished dogs who wind
between cats and kicks;
and birds with sharp bills lousing in the wind;
the craning tops of mountains;
and the chagrined stillness of pools;
the immersed algebra of trees
shaking the abacus of leaves;
the seeking, indefatigably despairing,
blue nailed fingers of the seas;
the tenderly perplexed gape of heavens;
the dumb in the subway,
suspended from forgotten coils of brain,
in arguing thoughtfulness
while sharp crystals cluster on their skulls;
the winded couples of the love couches who,
estranged by ecstasy,
fall into separate solitudes;—
all ask the question:

All stand before the rotund
ubiquitous beggar, Mystery,
shirking the piteous nullity of his face.

We search like rivers for a level
and we find the greater torment of the sea.
The storms rave to heaven
and the calms crouch
at the altar of the horizon.

The chill of the eves of battle,
spoor to the prows of ships
sharp prongs of the lightnings
muster call of the shadows,
secrecy of the folds of banners,
ancient apathies of the sands,
futile pursuits of flames,
all, questions.

Are we
valuable,
purposed,
immortal?

Pebble scatter, leaf lurch, chamber of mercury, shadow fray,
careers heedless voyages, laughless somersaults,
penances, fulfilments

Glory of civilization,—
a contrivance of utterance,
a contrivance of evasion,
a new accent, a new word,
subtler, more ingenious, exquisite, shrill
for the question.

Philosophy,
cynicism destitute,
making a formal rhetoric of pronouns,
a coquetry of the Sphinx,—
setting out decoy answers.

Religion—
brewing manias for vaccines
against its immanent insanity.

To the luxurious abyss
soft as a cradle and melodious
holding important the caprice,
of see-saws,

while the giddy towers of flesh,
flinging speed, exult like arrows,
let us go;
pleasure has a bottom;
the senses fail at two hundred and fifty miles an hour,
Hercules' labor was a myth,
to preserve ripeness that eludes
the rot of questions,
the full noons,
unburst bodies of women,
bloom of appetite,
is a folly of the heart.

Diligent science
trains the tongue.

Five fingers for chisels,
if necessary—
palm of a hand for a palette,
knee for a cornerstone,
stretched memory for a book,
lip wrench, knuckle castanets, toe drumsticks,
orchestras platformed on a man's body,
art creates island of
autocratic reality.

Three sitting down together,—
outside the censorious January wind,
nasally scolding,
the darkness
with tongues of shadow
hungrily at the light—
three sitting down together,
pass the questions between them,
like an objet d'art.

—*Isidore Schneider*

The Autumn Horsemen

I.

WITH galloping feet, the horsemen of the wind
Break through the branches of the trees, and scatter
The yellow leaves that fly before their path,
Twisting like golden sparks of rockets falling.

Autumn's red horsemen rage across the earth;
They speed in tumult out of the pale northeast,
They shake rain-lances and their long grey cloaks
In tattered folds are flying.

Autumn's red horsemen break and clash and stagger,
They lash their snorting beasts to fresh endeavor,
And still before them, leaves are skimming, flying
In steady flakes of gold.

Half of the tree is stript, and ere the rest
Can fall, the winds must trample through the naked boughs;
Half of the course is covered; ere they slacken,
They'll meet in battle with the spring's green horsemen.

II.

I know the horses I have ridden on
Were creatures of this earth, and sorry beasts;
But in the rhythm of their gallop racing
The rhythm of my life broke out at last.

The sand and gravel spirited from their hoofs,
The trees bent down and clashed on either side,
The roads went flying underneath my eyes
In long pale strips of tape:

I seemed united to the horse itself.
My eyes strained forward, and my thoughts went flying
Through the cool rush of wind upon my face,
Towards the distant goal:

The golden mountain-barrier of my dreams,
The peak of turquoise on the desert floor,
The distant wall of the world up which to ride
And see all things at last.

I grew intoxicated with swift effort;
Each turn gave promise of some new adventure,
So that I rose in the stirrups, sang and shouted,
Songs that I have forgot.

III.

Autumn's red horsemen stream across the earth.
Out of the plain they come and swiftly carry
Before them all the booty of the gale,
Dark heavy sacks of rain.

Autumn's red horsemen charge the western coast;
Spilling their booty, scrambling for the mountains,
The peaks that far away across red woodlands
Wreathe their dark brows with snow:

Autumn's red horsemen gallop night and day,
And I, because I too, have ridden horses,
Still gallop after them, forever seeking
A vision of new earth.

In the yellow falling leaves,
In the sound of hoofbeats thundering away to silence,
In the broken, hollow echoes of dead autumn,
I feel it stealing near.

In the shadows of ranked pines that clamber down the skyline,
In the sight of freshly-scattered snow, white at the edge of the
roadway,
I know that, following autumn, I too am passing swiftly
Towards my spring, at last.

—*John Gould Fletcher.*

Tension

WE sat so long without a word
That finally when a crying bird
Flew down between us suddenly—
Like a leaf shaken from a tree—
Cutting with an angry sound
The silence that had held us bound,
We knew it for a cruel word spoken,
We knew a delicate thing had broken,
And so rose desperately, and fled . . .

—*Harold Lewis Cook*

After Plenty

THEIR hungry tongues shall lick the wind
Who never knew such meat before,
And they shall count the winter kind
If they be fortunate to find
One rag to lay upon the floor.

One stick of wood to build a fire,
One bone to simmer in the pot:
To such they scarcely may aspire
Who have forsworn the last desire
Of the abundance they have not.

And when at fall of dark they creep
Into their bed for comfort sake,
Their hunger will have gnawed so deep
That even though they fall asleep
Their very dreams shall ache.

—*Bernard Raymund*

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Fresh Herbs

A Prayer Rug, by Jessica Nelson North. Will Ransom, Chicago.

JESSICA NELSON NORTH has given the wrong name to this fine little first book of hers—her lines of movement are not flat and horizontal as in a woven thing, but straight up as in something growing. Rug should not be her symbol of quality, nor should prayer, for, like Clemence Dane's Queen Elizabeth, she is "not meek". Even the kind of rug it is—her own, no ordinary one, as see the poem by that name—does not make me reconciled to the implications of the title.

She is, perhaps too much, perhaps not, a poet's poet. Certainly poets will enjoy her more than other people will. Persons who also like to juggle words and lines, who are surprised at their own superb inevitable rhymes, find in Miss North their playmate. She is a happy craftsman, free and quick, as in "The Exacting Mistress":

Leap from this moonlit hill
Into the moon.
There to traverse a still
And tideless sea,
That I may know more soon your love for me.

Or snare with silken trap
A unicorn
To munch at morn
His sugar from my lap.

Oh never, never woo
With simple things
Whereof I have no lack.

Blossoms and sweets my lesser lover brings
But you . . .

Leap to the moon and back,
Bring me a unicorn.

But there is more than craftsmanship, though who shall say where craftsmanship starts or stops in a satisfying poem, and what would it be worth without an adequate material to mold? There is, besides, the cold, wild touch of earth, a clearly gnarled design for seal set in her lines. "Ambush" is an example:

Who would crouch with me at the fountain-head
Of lost lakes in the dusk of rainy springs
When the dark air is full of wheeling wings,
And white on marshy shores, untenanted
The ice breaks?

Who would follow the shining teal to bed
Or green drakes in a thicket of rustling reeds,
Where the wild rice sprouts from the thawing seeds
And gulls wheel
And the ice breaks,
And the lone crane feeds by the fountain-head
Of lost lakes?

And there is love—"Hunger Inn" nearly unbearable, and "Sumerian Cycle", "Trail's End" and "A Marionette" and "Lullaby" and, most frankly pregnable and desperate of them all, though in so frail a form, so slight a poem about a bird, "Under the Eaves." And for solace "A Promise":

Time will have its way,
Time, patiently moving,
Water in quiet weather
Grinding together
The hard stones of our loving.

Sharp stones that now we tread
With pierced ecstatic feet
Time will make round and sweet.

Some day
Our lives that cried and bled,
Will lie down together
Like waves in quiet weather
In a smooth, cool bed.

There is emotion, pressed and commingled and savored, as are her "Herbs":

I give myself to you. My life I break
Now to anoint your feet.
Like costly spikenard opened for your sake
My years are sweet;

My aromatic years. And if their scent
Trouble your wisdom, being hard to trace,
Never inquire what herbs for them were blent
In earlier days;

Nor tremble if barbaric odors blow
Across the quiet savor of our lot.
Only the compound can concern us now.
The rest is not, is not.

She is a woman—no, a girl—who, being a poet, dares to write of
being hurt, and can be always, almost always, gay. For instance,
there is "Remedy":

You could not spurn me so
That earth would not endure me,
Nor bring my heart so low
That summer could not cure me.

A goldfinch on a spray
Trills the warm hours away:

"Tra-lee, tra-lira-la!
Love is a bubble.
Never begin with *.
What do you win with it?
Nothing but trouble."

The humble clover
Has been more true to me than any lover.
I have laid me in despair
On the hill-top praying that the dust might hide me.
Her sunny head and fair
The clover laid beside me.

The rain has wept with me
In silver agitation.
The boughs of the linden tree
Are heavy with consolation.

—*Louise Townsend Nicholl*

A Jewel Hard Enough

Black Armour, by *Elinor Wylie*. *George H. Doran Co., New York.*

Beddoes' lines,
The . . habergeon of his limbs enamelled
With sanguine almandines and rainy pearl

might have been said of the knight that wears this suit of black
armour for, be assured, it is richly gemmed. But the jewels seem
actually, as with volcanian heat, to be fused with and made a part of
the dark metal, as if it were their matrix; jewels of innumerable
bright facets that catch and flash the strange, Borgian light which
plays upon them all.

Is this a book of iron rhymes and azure rhythms? I do not know—nor if I did, could I say it in another way.

Think of deep waves,—of such depths they have a metallic density,—beating upon the emerald walls of subaqueous caverns; think of anything eerily exotic and beautiful; and you will have, remotely, the unusual sense and feeling of these poems. Here is poetry for a poet to enjoy,—something removed.

Th sonnet search for the many rhyme words accelerates, of course, the gathering of associations. With these Mrs. Wylie achieves a particularly fascinating synthesis, as in "Unfinished Portrait," "Three Wishes" and "King Honour"—this latter, doubtless, some dark ambassador of lust, for we read that the son gotten of his union with the wholesome mother was

Wrong as the first born of a mandrake root.

Other older singers have had visions of that weird root and it would be interesting to pierce back and see from what poets this poet stems—Webster? and? but then she is almost always especially herself.

It would be difficult to quote any one poem as adequately representative of the rest—: "Full Moon", that "travails with a skeleton"; "The Good Birds", as mystical as a burning bush; "Let No Charitable Hope", into which the poet has poured beautifully her wry, ironic silver; the cameos cut from the antique at the end of the book—, but let us quote that vivid sketch of Velasquez, "Castilian":

Velasquez took a pliant knife
And scraped his palette clean;
He said, "I lead a dog's life
Painting a king and queen."

He cleaned his palette with oily rags
And oakum from Seville wharves;
"I am sick of painting painted hags
And bad ambiguous dwarves.

"The sky is silver, the clouds are pearl,
Their locks are looped with rain.
I will not paint Maria's girl
For all the money in Spain."

He washed his face in water cold,
His hands in turpentine;
He squeezed out colour like coins of gold
And colour like drops of wine.

Each colour lay like a little pool
On the polished cedar wood;
Clear and pale and ivory-cool
Or dark as solitude.

He burnt the rags in the fireplace
And leaned from the window high;
He said, "I like that gentleman's face
Who wears his cap awry."

This is the gentleman, there he stands,
Castilian, sombre-caped,
With arrogant eyes, and narrow hands
Miraculously shaped.

Reading *Black Armour* you may wonder that I chose something comparatively slight for quotation but you will see at least that they are all as exquisitely done as that.

If there is somewhere a jewel hard enough to be the tiny, eternal pivot of time and space, this poet must have run across it and secured its secret. I say this because I leave these poems with the sense that there is something in them which would be similarly unaffected by any attrition.

—Kenneth Slade Alling

CONTRIBUTORS

H. UNDERWOOD HOYT, of Burlington, Vermont, has just come home from a trip to the Orient. "‘More Lovely Than a Mountainside,’" she says, "I wrote in the China Sea; and ‘An Unprejudiced Mind’ just after leaving Java—going northward toward the Equator. Giant tree ferns and orchids of the tropics make Vermont only more dear."

ABBIE HUSTON EVANS, who "sent poems off for eighteen years before one was taken," is a frequent contributor to *The Measure*. Her home is in Camden, Maine, but she is now in Philadelphia, taking charge of The Settlement Music School.

ISIDORE SCHNEIDER, of New York, in a recent letter to a *Measure* editor, said this which he had no idea would get quoted: "I am hoping to get a book to read which contains no realism, whose characters are not human nor human types, in other words a book in which the author does not serve as a combination photographer, style designer, and dictaphone operator, but as an imaginative creator; and if I can't get such a book to read, I will write one as soon as I get a job when I can have at least my evenings free."

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER has just returned to England, where he lives, after a visit here, where he was born.

HAROLD LEWIS COOK lives in Evanston, Ill.

BERNARD RAYMUND is a teacher of English at the Ohio State University in Columbus, and is the author of *Hidden Waters*, Yale University Press.

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